

Groton Headmaster Ends 25-Year Tenure

Crocker Has Guided School Through a Period of Change

By JOHN H. FENTON
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GROTON, Mass., June 12—When the Rev. John Crocker steps out of the Groton School chapel for the last time as headmaster a few days hence, he will look across an attractive campus that apparently has changed little since he was a schoolboy there in 1918.

But as Mr. Crocker well knows, and as other graduates have come to learn during his 25 years as headmaster, appearances at the supposedly staid New England boarding school can be deceptive.

Since 1940, when Mr. Crocker succeeded Groton's founder, the Rev. Endicott Peabody, as headmaster, the school has steadily and calmly been sawing away the shackles that bound it to the Victorian snobishness of its beginnings.

After Prize Day, Wednesday, Mr. Crocker will be succeeded by the Rev. Bertrand Honea, Jr., who is not a Groton graduate or a New England Yankee, but a Texan. Mr. Honea will be in the Groton tradition set down in 1884 by the founding fathers as an ordained priest of the Protestant Episcopal Church.

One has only to move a few steps to the left of the gothic chapel for a glimpse of visible change at Groton, a gymnasium of modern design that was dedicated in 1963. It was the first new building on the campus since 1904. And in deference to Groton sensibilities in making changes, the trustee ruled that the building should not be visible from the front door of the chapel.

The new gymnasium resembles some modernistic churches, having somewhat of an A-frame roof and end walls of natural wooden joists. The locker rooms and athletic offices are below ground.

Real Changes Among Students

The real changes at Groton, however, are in the student body.

In 1951, three years before the Supreme Court decision outlawing segregation in public schools, Groton had accepted its first Negro. It was not a token gesture. Mr. Crocker had to endure bitter opposition from conservative alumni after convincing the trustees of the Christian justice of his move.

In April of this year, Mr. Crocker and his wife, the former Mary Hollowell, with 75 Groton boys, marched with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. during a rain-soaked civil rights demonstration in Boston. Several of the Groton students were Negroes.

Next fall there will be about a dozen Negroes at Groton, and one of them may be a prefect, supervising the activities of younger boys. One of the present students is the son of a tenant farmer in Virginia and another the son of a Brooklyn truck driver.

When the first Negro was accepted, Mr. Crocker said it would be "self-righteous" for the school to publicize the acceptance. But he likes to point out that in 1940 Groton's scholarship budget was \$25,000, which went to help 35 boys, who otherwise could not have afforded to enroll. This year 58 boys are sharing in a scholarship budget of \$80,000.

May Be Enrolled at Birth

Boys still may be enrolled for Groton at birth, as they have been since Mr. Peabody's day. But the percentage of Groton sons on the rolls has dropped from 40 per cent to 30. The home addresses of the 200 boys there now cover most of the 50 states, Argentina, England, Turkey, Mexico, Ghana and Saudi Arabia.

Groton accepts 40 new boys each fall and keeps its enrollment at 200. All must pass an entrance examination. It is intended to be a six-year school aimed at providing a continuous educational development from the seventh grade through high school.

"We get these boys when they are pre-adolescents," Mr. Crocker said the other day, "and with a faculty of 34 we are able to guide them through into their adolescent years with



Richard A. Sheinwald for The New York Times
The Rev. John Crocker outside of gymnasium at Groton

considerable individual attention."

Although the students are under close supervision, the masters share sports and other activities with them and try to gain their trust. In most cases they are successful. As the boys move closer to the 12th grade,

or the first form, they are given more and more individual responsibility.

"Scholarship, of course, is tremendously important," Mr. Crocker said, "but we also are intensely interested in developing a sense of personal initiative and of responsibility."

First Negro Student Admitted in '51—12 Now Attend

With a tight-knit student body and faculty, Mr. Crocker and Paul W. Wright, a layman who is senior master, are able to handle administrative duties with the help of two women secretaries, as well as to teach some courses. Discipline and day-to-day policy are worked out with the students.

Some things about Groton remain much as they were in Mr. Peabody's day. The boys still sleep on iron-frame beds in individual cubicles with hooks on the walls for their clothes. And they wash in communal washrooms, at soapstone sinks with polished brass pipes.

Studying is done under supervision in special rooms removed from the sleeping quarters. Latin and Greek are still respected if not venerated. The science department specimen cabinets have their full complement of colored balls, depicting the nucleus of the atom.

While a few electric guitars have begun to appear, their use is limited to free time. Formal exposure to music is through concerts. Addiction to abnormally long hair or sideburns is quietly disparaged, and neckties and jackets are worn in public, including to meals and at classes.

With classes on Saturdays still the norm, the only free weekend in the school year, except holiday recesses, is Thanksgiving.

These are some of the vestiges of English school-keeping that Mr. Peabody introduced. It produced a President, Franklin D. Roosevelt, as well as leaders in banking, the arts, education and diplomacy.